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The Mad Hunter;

OR,

The Mystery of the Beaver Dam.

A THRILLING TALE OF THE NORTHWEST:

By CAPTAIN WILL DAYTON.

Author of "Little Hal, the Boy Engineer," "The Cruise of the 'Beauty,'" "The Young Explorers," "Ned Owen: or, The Mystery of a Missing Ship," "The Blasted Pine," "Billy Bangs' Schooldays," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN-EATER AND THE CHIPPEWAS.

WINTER in the woods!

The woods of Northern Minnesota, close to the Canada line, in the dead of winter, when lake and river, hill and dale are closely grasped by the icy fingers of the frost king.

The ice lies a foot thick upon the bosom of Red Lake river, and over this is spread a mantle of snow, dazzlingly white and as smooth as glass.

The surrounding scenery is in unison, for the pines are laden with a fleecy burden, and the cliffs that line the sides of the river bank are all patched and glazed over with glistening sheets of ice and scattered drifts.

Winter holds everything in its dread embrace, and a silence as of death pervades the place, adding to the weird solemnity of the scene.

It was upon such a scene, one cold afternoon, many years ago, upon which one might have gazed in silence, the very stillness forbidding any interruption.

Presently, however, there was a crackling in the bushes, and then there emerged from the underbrush the figure of a human being clad in a fashion that would arouse grave doubts as to his being an agreeable person to meet.

He was very tall, nearly seven feet in height, and dressed in garments whose prevailing hue was a horrible red, as though they had been dipped in human blood.

The clothes were of finely-dressed skin, from the coat to the trousers and leggings, but each piece was of that deep red color, even to the sash around the man's waist.

The fringe of the leggings was of black hair—human hair—in long locks, and without doubt the Chippewa Indians had furnished it from their reeking scalps.

What arrested the attention most of all, however, was the peculiar head-dress worn by this strange person.

It was of fur, surmounted by a bare and grinning skull, firmly attached to the painted crown.

The man's face was almost wholly invisible, as a thick, black beard covered the lower half, and the singular helmet he wore was pulled down almost to his eyes, which were protected by a small, thin piece of wood pierced with a narrow slit to prevent snow blindness.

The first effect was that the man's real head and face were in the hideous skull, and it was therefore no wonder that he was not an agreeable person to meet alone in the woods.

This remarkable personage was provided with huge snow-shoes, which he handled with remarkable dexterity, and carried a rifle of peculiar construction slung across his shoulder.

Upon emerging from the thicket, the man paused upon the edge of the river, at a point where the sudden winding of the stream, as well as an artificial obstruction of fallen trees indicated the resort of a colony of those busy animals, beavers.

Through the ice in several places could be seen the clay roofs, the submarine dwellings of these most remarkable rodents, projecting to the height of a foot or so above the surface.

Having reached this spot, the intruder paused in a listening attitude, bending nearly to the ground, in order to catch the faintest sound.

From his excited manner and the furtive glances he cast around him, it was plain to be seen that he was being tracked.

Hastily unslinging his rifle, he peered cautiously in the direction he had just come, poised his weapon in uncertainty for a moment, and then hastily slung it over his shoulder once more.

Then unfastening his racquets or snow shoes, he quickly disappeared behind a clump of bushes, which stood upon the river bank.

Hardly had he got out of sight, before a dusky visage was

thrust through the very opening, whence he had made his first appearance.

For some moments the Indian, for such the new-comer was, reconnoitered the river bank, the frozen dam, the cliffs beyond, and the stretch of ice in front, in perfect silence.

Then, evidently convinced that the prey he sought was not in sight, the Indian parted the branches and stepped boldly forth.

He was clad in full war costume, and was followed by no less than fifteen stalwart warriors, all similarly dressed.

Despite their numbers, the savages seemed to observe a strange hesitancy, and followed the plainly visible tracks of the solitary hunter in dead silence.

Suddenly the chief, who was somewhat in advance of the others, clapped his hand to his head and staggered, while a huge warrior close behind, threw up his arms and fell dead, almost without a struggle.

Not a sound had been heard, and no enemy was in sight, and yet here, before their very faces, one of their number had been struck dead in an instant, and without the slightest premonition of danger.

There had been no report, no curl of smoke, no smell of gunpowder, yet here lay the dead body of a powerful warrior, with a small blue orifice in the center of his forehead, which showed plainly that a bullet had penetrated it.

The same bullet had grazed the temple of the chief, giving him a narrow escape and showing plainly that he it was, in all probability, that this mysterious assassin had wanted to kill.

With a wild shout the enraged chief rushed forward, brandishing his tomahawk, but when he reached the solitary bush behind which the stranger had disappeared, there was no one to be seen.

From this spot all traces had disappeared, and though there was a large open space just beyond, not a single track was visible in any direction.

The footprints came as far as the bush and then suddenly stopped altogether, leaving the savages very much mystified.

Filled with a nameless terror the savages fled at once, leaving the body of their dead comrade upon the snow, and never paused until they had gone fully half a mile.

Then they suddenly paused and all eyes were turned to the chief, who drew himself up to his full height and said:

"Chippewas! another of our braves has fallen by the magic gun of the Man-eater! Without noise, without smoke, it has sent Spotted Lynx to the hunting grounds of the Great Spirit, where so many of our tribe have already gone, slain by this terrible being."

He paused for an instant, and then in tones which betrayed excitement, continued:

"Let us return quickly and recover his body, warriors, lest it share the same horrible fate as the others."

After a short parley they set out to return to the dam, carefully scrutinizing every rod of the road, for fear that the dreaded enemy might suddenly put in an appearance.

No interruption occurred, however, and when they reached the beaver dams, the sight of a brisk fire, glimmering through the trees, caused them an indescribable terror.

With paled faces and tottering knees they crept to the

now expiring fire, there being no one in sight, and gazed with the utmost horror upon what they there beheld.

They had evidently expected to see some horrible sight, and, if so, they were not disappointed.

Suspended over the fire from a cross-tree was the naked body of their dead comrade, from which long strips of flesh had been cut and evidently roasted and eaten, half-masticated pieces being scattered here and there upon the snow.

It was a sickening spectacle, and it was no wonder that the savages were shocked at the sight, and turned away in horror and disgust.

He who had partaken of this horrible feast was nowhere visible, however, and the wrath of the savages was impotent.

They ran hither and thither, but could find no trace of the man-eater, and at last they were compelled to give up the search.

"Braves of the Chippewas," cried the chief, "we have found many such camp-fires as this, with the roasted bodies of our warriors hanging over them, and still the hated man-eater lives. He is a coward, he flies from us, he slays in silence. Fear not, my braves, for Wild Horse has sworn to kill this demon. One more of our tribe has fallen, but we shall triumph yet!"

Then, with a parting yell, the Indians disappeared in the forest, taking the direction of their village.

CHAPTER II.

THE STORY OF CANNIBAL MATT.

ON the evening succeeding the above recorded events, a number of men were seated in the principal room of the only tavern in Crookston, kept by one Seth Prendergast.

Outside the snow was driving and drifting furiously, which made the interior of the tavern a welcome place, each man being provided with a pipe and a glass of hot whisky.

Jim Schneider, a type of the ordinary bar-room loafer, who never refuses to drink when asked, was holding forth to the rest upon a most exciting topic, and they all gave him their undivided attention.

"You vas see, shentlemens," he said, after taking a huge swallow of the exhilarating beverage in his glass, "dot I vas knowed dis Cannibal Matty vell. He vas de terror auf dem Shippeway Ingines, und dey vas like to had his schalp."

"Py Shiminy, he was killed one halluf auf der dribe already, und vas make sandwiches mit deir meat, vat he always carries around mit him."

"I don't pelief meinself dot he vas a men, but der tuyfil, pecause he don't got some head on his shoulders, but on'y a shkull. He vas ten foots high up, und his glothes vas all der dime dripping mit dot blood auf dem Ingines."

"When he vas shoot dem he vas makes no noise, und he walks mitout making no dracks. So hellup me, I dinks he was der tuyfil all der vile, und no mans at all."

"He vas kill a feller a mile away, und der light vot gomes out auf der holes in his shkull could be seed fur dwice dot length. So hellup me, I told you dot Cannibal Matt vas a derror und no beefsteak."

"Ain't ye [giving it to us rayther stiff, Dutchy?" interrupted one of his listeners.

"Steef, vas it. Nein, by Grismas! und I vas nicht tole

yer der halluf auf dot. He was liff under wader mit dose peavers, und nopody vas catch him. He vas killin' off dem Shippeway Ingines so gwick dot dey don't know vere dey was already, und he eats all auf dem what he kills, so hellup me."

"He is probably some poor half crazy trapper," said the man who had made the former objections to the truth of the story, "and the Chippewas, or some one else, have invented this story to frighten people."

"I'll bate you halluf a pound auf dobacker dot de story vas drue, und I leaf it to Frank Standish if it vasn't."

Frank Standish was a handsome young fellow of about twenty-one, who owned a small farm near Crookston, and who was generally liked by all his neighbors.

Frank was sitting near, waiting for the storm to cease, and when Schneider appealed to him all eyes were turned in his direction.

"Oh, if you take Frank Standish for authority," said a man named Oliver, or "Noll" Edwards, in a sneering tone, "we will have to believe you, for he is never wrong in anything."

Edwards was a lawyer, who had established himself in the town some years previous to Frank's coming, and was somewhat older than the latter, for whom he had conceived a great dislike.

Frank treated every one pleasantly, however, and so, in answer to the disagreeable remark of Edwards, he returned a cheerful response.

"I think Jim has got the main points correct," he said, with a smile, "although he may have woven more or less of romance about it. The tale is a simple one when you get down to the real facts."

"Dot's vot I tole you," said Jim, triumphantly. "Der Shippeway vas tole der shtory straid, und dey dinks dot dis feller vas oxcited by der white fellers to glean dem oud, und dey vas got so mad as dunder."

"That is unfortunate," said Frank, "for we have managed to remain upon good terms with the tribe for a long time, and it would be a pity to have any trouble with them on account of this strange creature."

"Oh, if you believe in him so thoroughly," remarked Edwards, in the same sneering tone that he had before made use of, "you'd better tell us the whole story. You can doubtless improve vastly upon Jim Schneider's exaggerated account."

"Yes, tell us the story, Frank!" cried all hands.

"Since you wish it, I will do so, though doubtless you have all heard some of the particulars before.

"You remember, I presume, that the winter, five years ago—yes, more than that, come to think—there was a great scarcity of game, amounting to a famine almost.

"There was at that time settled with his wife and child, a girl of about ten years old, upon the borders of Red Lake, a trapper called Matthew North.

"Owing to the difficulty of obtaining food, the Indians were well nigh starved, and owing to their recent trouble with the settlers, could not depend upon the latter for even a single meal.

"The settlers at that time would sooner see a Chippewa starve than give him a crust of bread; and Matt North had

laid in a supply of provisions exceeding that of any of his neighbors.

"The Indians got wind of this, and came to him very humbly, begging for just enough to keep them from starvation, but Matt laughed scornfully at the poor suppliants, and kicked them out of his house.

"The Indians departed, vowing vengeance, and after they had gone, Matt reflected that they might at some unguarded moment enter his cabin during his absence, and carry off all his provisions.

"He resolved to hide them, therefore, without loss of time, and upon that very night he managed to convey all his pork, bear's meat and pemmican to a secure place, where he made a *cache* which no one but himself could find.

"The work kept him employed all the night, and in the morning when he returned, a dreadful sight met his affrighted gaze.

"His cabin was burned to the ground, and the charred and mutilated remains of his wife were found in the still glowing embers, and worse than that, pieces of the flesh had been eaten, the savages, driven to desperation by starvation, having become cannibals.

"The child was missing, but there was no doubt as to her probable fate, and poor Matt's brain reeled with the thought.

"When he recovered from his stupor his reason had fled, but in his madness he swore a deadly oath that he would never rest until he had killed and devoured a certain number of the tribe who had brought this dreadful misfortune upon him.

"Already he has slain many of his enemies, and he still lies in wait for them, though I doubt that he eats their flesh, as is reported, for that seems too horrible to credit."

"Pshaw! Your story is as bad as Jim's," said Noll Edwards, scornfully, when Frank had finished; "with the exception that yours is more——"

At this moment the outside door was rudely dashed open, and a man, dressed as a hunter, but looking pale and terrified, rushed into the room and fell upon a bench.

"*Mon dieu!*" he gasped, "gif me soamtheeing to drink; a glass of brandy, anysing! I haf seen him!"

"Why, it's Johnny Bat," said one of the men, "the French Kanuck."

"Oh, Lor', I sall go mad!" said the man, hastily swallowing a large quantity of brandy. "*Sacre nous!* I hope nevaire to see such a sight again!"

"What have you seen?" demanded every one.

"Ze cannibal at his horrid feast, as sure as I live!"

CHAPTER III.

THE HUNTER'S STORY—MAY AND HER ADMIRERS.

JOHNNY BAT, as he was called, was a French Canadian, his real name being Jean Baptiste, which had been corrupted into the above.

He was a hunter and guide, and his word was considered as good as any man's in the northwest, so when he declared positively that he had seen the cannibal at his terrible repast, no one doubted him for an instant.

The most intense excitement prevailed, and when the

hunter had somewhat recovered his spirits, for he seemed greatly overcome, the men demanded the story with the most feverish interest.

After taking another stiff horn of brandy, Johnny Bat, being pressed by the loiterers to give an account of the affair, cleared his throat and proceeded:

"Well, *mes amis*, I was coming down ze rivaire, zis afternoon, and when I comes to ze dam, I see a light, like it was a little fire blazing in ze bush.

"What would you sink to see a fire in ze bush? Zat somebodee was making himself a dinner, or was making warm to himself. Exactly, and zat is what I tinks myself, but you sall see what I did see by zat fire in ze bush.

"Zis spot has a bad name, as I tell you, and I creep along carefully to de fire, and when I got near, *mon dieu!* what do I see but zis man, what you call him, that eats a man."

"The cannibal, you mean."

"*Oui*, zat is it, ze cannibal, his coat all blood, his head nossing but a skull what grins at you, zis man was by ze fire, and ovaire it was ze roasting body of ze poor dead sauvage! *Mon dieu*, it make me sick to my estomac."

"You're dreaming," said Noll Edwards.

"*Sacre bleu!* I no dream, I see him, by gar! I wish I was dream. I see ze fire, and ze body, and zen this horrid man he cut a piece off, and, *sacre*, I stay no more to see him; it is too moche, and I run away so fast as I can. *Mon dieu!* I nevaire believed zis storie, but now I see him, wiz my own eye, it is not possible to say it is not true."

No one could doubt Johnny Bat, and no attention was paid to Noll's sneers, for the matter was too terrible to be met with ridicule; and if this cannibal really existed, as there now seemed to be no doubt, the sooner he was gotten rid of the better.

While the men were warmly discussing the advisability of hunting the terrible creature down and giving him over to the tender mercies of Judge Lynch, a diversion was created by the appearance of a young girl in the room.

This was May Prendergast, the daughter of the tavern-keeper, and as pretty a girl as the sun ever shone upon, albeit there was a sad expression in her beautiful face that was as strange as it was touching, for May wanted for nothing, and always seemed happy and contented.

The young men of Crookston were all in love with May, who was the belle of the village, but as yet there seemed to be but two upon whom she would deign to smile.

These two were Frank Standish, the farmer, and Noll Edwards, the lawyer, and it was the latter's inordinate conceit and jealousy that made him treat Frank so cavalierly, although the young farmer never took any notice of this, and thus increased the lawyer's hatred.

Everybody turned when May entered the room, and for a moment she seemed about to retreat, having evidently not expected to find so many men about.

She smiled sweetly upon Frank, nodded to Edwards, and then went to one of the windows, raised the curtain, and looked out upon the storm.

She had been there for some moments, deeply engaged in thought, when some one addressed her, saying:

"You are annoyed at something, Miss May? I am sorry for that."

She turned and saw Noll Edwards standing by her side.

"I am not exactly annoyed," she answered, "though I was depending upon having such a fine time to-morrow night at the skating party, and now the snow will spoil it all."

"That is really too bad," answered the lawyer, "but I don't see how we can help it."

"It is easy enough," said Frank, coming forward and joining in the conversation, "and if you desire to skate on the pond to-morrow night, I can gratify your wish easily."

"You can? How can you do it?" asked May.

"Order the snow to stop, I suppose," said Edwards, with ill-concealed vexation at having his little *tete-a-tete* interrupted.

"By no means," said Frank. "We will let it stop and then clear off the pond with stiff brooms and snow-shovels. Then we can build a fire in the middle and have all the fun we like."

May was delighted at this proposal, and praised Frank for his ingenuity, while Edwards cursed himself for not thinking of so simple a plan.

"Will you give me the first skate with you, for providing you with this pleasure?" asked Frank, when May had done thanking him, and she readily consented.

"If you don't intend to give yourself entirely to Mr. Standish, perhaps you might deign to afford me the pleasure of skating with you, also?" said Edwards, in a by no means pleasant tone.

May did not notice this, however, and in a cheery voice replied that she should be at the disposal of any one who was good enough to ask her to skate with him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SKATING PARTY—MUTUAL DECLARATIONS—MAY ABDUCTED.

THE next night the pond was all swept clear as Frank had promised, and covered with a nice gathering of skaters, who glided hither and thither, and enjoyed themselves to the utmost.

A large fire was lighted, and as the gleam of the flames was cast upon the glittering ice and the swiftly-moving forms of the skaters, the effect was most picturesque.

Many of the young women and some of the young men wore fanciful cloaks, dominoes and masks, the fun consisting in discovering the identity of the maskers.

One young lady had dressed herself to look like the snow queen, and made as fine an appearance as any one upon the ice.

It is needless to say that this young lady was May Prendergast, and that the young man in a red cloak skating with her was Frank, for such was the case.

After making the circuit of the pond three or four times, Frank and May sat down upon a bench placed on the bank, and, removed from observation, began to say those things which lovers have always said and always will say to the end of time, and which need no describing.

In short, Frank made a declaration, proposed and was accepted, and then the two started off again to make the rounds, and not to attract attention by remaining away too long.

There had been a listener to this fond scene, for, unknown to the lovers, Noll Edwards had heard every word

that was spoken, from his place of concealment behind a tree.

He heard, with anguish and unspeakable rage, that May had never loved him as he supposed, but had only treated him courteously because she did the same to every one, but that she had always admired Frank and was willing to marry him.

Noll ground his teeth in impotent fury, and wished a hundred times that he might strangle Frank, for cheating him out of his love as he called it, though it was only his inordinate conceit that made him think May loved him when any one else could have told him that she did not care a straw more for him than for a dozen others, and, perhaps, not as much.

When he had learned the whole unsavory truth he slunk away to another part of the pond, where Prendergast, with a keen eye to business, had set up an improvised bar, and sold whisky and rum at the usual prices, finding many customers.

Here Noll found Jim Schneider, hanging around waiting for somebody to ask him to have a drink, and looking very longingly at the casks from which the beverages were drawn.

"Take a drink with me, Jim?" asked Edwards, who had a use to which to put the bumper, and desired to get him well warmed up with whisky before he broached the subject.

Jim took two or three hot drinks, and then Noll suddenly said:

"Jim, how would you like to make a hundred dollars?"

"Py Shiminy, I didn't know dere vas so much money in der whole vorlt as dot. You bet you I would like to make him."

"I'll tell you how you can do it, then, if you come with me."

"I bade you I vill, on'y you must shust wait while I dakes dis red cloak to Frank Standish. He gif it to me on der ice a while ago, und ax me to dake gare of it. I vas gif it to him now, und get anoder whisky."

"Give it to me," said Noll, muttering to himself, "it may come handy," and then snatching the cloak from the inebriate, said:

"I'll give it to him, myself. Come with me and I'll tell you what I want you to do."

We will leave the two plotters to themselves for awhile and return to the young lovers, who seemed to enjoy skating together now, much more than mixing with the crowd.

They were off by themselves at one end of the pond, when suddenly a series of shrieks and startled cries was heard from the upper end.

A complete panic seemed to have taken possession of every one, and they scattered in every direction, though the majority of the skaters rushed towards Frank and May.

Then Frank beheld the cause of the tumult, for striking deliberately across the pond was seen the figure of Cannibal Matt, clad in his blood-red garments and wearing the hideous skull head-dress.

In spite of the chill at his heart, occasioned by the sight of the terrible apparition, Frank gazed with great interest upon the creature, and even with some degree of composure.

A wavering, flickering light seemed to come from the eyeless sockets of the skull, and as far as could be seen the man had no other head, but Frank felt assured that there was trickery somewhere, and determined to fathom the mystery if possible.

Leaving May alone, he started off in pursuit of the mysterious being, but though he skated rapidly he succeeded in reaching the bank only in time to see the stranger disappearing under the trees.

The cannibal still wore his snow shoes, and could make rapid progress over the fleecy surface, while Frank went floundering up to his middle at every second step, and made very slow progress.

Convinced that he could not hope to come up with the man in this way, he returned to the pond and had not yet reached the bank, when the cries of terror broke out afresh.

Plunging headlong through the snow, he presently reached the ice, and then struck out energetically, and in a few minutes reached the further end of the pond where the greatest excitement was going on.

He learned, after some trouble, for no one seemed capable of giving a straight answer, that the cannibal had recrossed the pond soon after his disappearance at the upper end, rushing through the terrified crowd with the rapidity of lightning.

In a few minutes the crowd seemed to recover its spirits, being much more frightened than hurt, and then Frank began to look around for May, but without success.

Being now thoroughly alarmed, the young man began making anxious inquiries concerning May, but no one could tell positively when they had last seen her, though a few declared that she had gone home with Noll Edwards.

Frank knew better than this, however, and presently a cry was heard at some distance, in the voice of Noll himself, and hastening to the spot they found him evidently very much exhausted.

"What's the matter, Noll?" they asked.

"Have you seen May?" demanded Frank.

"The cannibal—carried off," gasped Noll, in broken sentences.

"Good Good! what mean you?" cried Frank, in accents of despair.

"I mean that she has been—carried off—by that demon," said Edwards, rather more coherently than at first.

"For Heaven's sake, explain yourself, man," said Frank, pale as death and terribly excited.

"I was standing not far from here when he made his way through the crowd, and though he passed me like lightning, I saw that he carried a human form in his arms."

"Great Heaven!"

"By the dress I recognized it as May Prendergast, and the poor young lady must have fainted, for she uttered no sound."

"Did you not try to stop the villain?"

"Indeed I did, but he brushed me by as if I had been a leaf. Crazed with excitement, however, I rushed madly after him, and followed his tracks for some distance into the wood."

"And he escaped?"

"If I had been provided with snow shoes I would not

have given up the chase so soon, but without them I could do nothing, and I was soon left far behind, so I thought the best thing to do was to return and give the alarm."

To describe poor Frank's feelings during this recital would be impossible. Horror, indignation, grief, despair were in turns felt by his noble heart, and he could scarcely refrain from blaming the whole thing upon himself, because he had left May, even for so short a time.

He was aroused from his stupor by Jack Manly, a most intimate friend, who tried to cheer him up, and suggested that a systematic search be organized without delay.

The idea of rescuing Mary from the power of the terrible Cannibal Matt, seemed to give Frank new life, and he said firmly:

"Yes, let us go at once, you and I, and never give up until we find her."

Noll Edwards volunteered to go with them, and urged his claim so strongly that Frank was obliged to consent, which, had he known the false heart of the man, he would have never done.

CHAPTER V.

THE WORK OF A VILLAIN.

THE little party at once started for the village to obtain rifles and snow shoes, without which latter it would be impossible to travel through the bush.

The moon shone brightly, and the tracks left by the huge racquets of the cannibal were plainly distinguishable, though as the party proceeded and the crust grew harder, they became less plain, and finally died out altogether.

Guided by instinct rather than sight, however, the party after a long search found themselves in the neighborhood of the beaver dam, when one of the men exclaimed in cautious tones:

"I see a fire ahead!"

In an instant all the frightful tales connected with the cannibal arose to Frank's recollection, and he nearly staggered under the whirlwind of emotion that swept over his soul.

Edwards, of all the party, alone seemed to retain his coolness, and in a firm voice he said:

"Forward! I see nothing to alarm us as yet."

Thereupon they proceeded with a certain amount of caution, and advanced into an open space, in the center of which the Frenchman had seen suspended the body of the Indian.

Contrary to expectation, there was nothing to terrify one, there being nothing more dreadful than two upright stakes with a crossbar placed across them, from which a kettle could be suspended, and a few bones scattered about on the snow.

Nobody was in sight, and a silence of death brooded over the place, which was suddenly broken by Noll Edwards, who exclaimed in startling tones:

"My, God! see what I have found!"

Frank and the rest rushed forward as Edwards picked up something from the snow, and gazed at it in the greatest terror.

The object which caused him and the whole party such a

fright, was nothing more than a long strip of fleecy white cotton, but it told a dreadful tale, and suggested terrible possibilities.

Frank recognized it at once as part of the disguise of the snow queen assumed by May, and his blood seemed to freeze in his veins at the sight.

"Merciful Heavens! my darling has fallen a prey to this inhuman monster!" he almost shrieked.

Then, in a calmer voice, and yet in tones which plainly indicated the dreadful excitement under which he was laboring, he said:

"Search, my boys, search in all directions. We may yet be in time to save her."

The party spread out, and made a thorough search in every direction, but were rewarded with no further signs of the presence of either the young lady or the cannibal.

Jack and Frank conferred apart for several minutes, and then it was decided that the presence of so large a party would necessarily interfere with the object to be gained, and that all but the two friends had better return at once to the village.

Edwards was most anxious to remain, but Frank insisted that he and Jack were all that were necessary to remain and watch for the cannibal, and, at last, with the greatest apparent reluctance, Edwards was induced to return with the others, and Frank and his friend were left alone.

While the two young men are engaged upon this somewhat perilous mission, let us return to May and see what has become of her.

After Frank had left in pursuit of the cannibal, she retired to the bench where they had previously been sitting, and sat down to rest.

She had been there but a moment when she was delighted at seeing the well-known figure in the red cloak standing at some little distance, beckoning to her to keep silent.

Then it started a little way into the wood, and, fearful that something might happen to him, she followed him quickly into the gloom without taking a thought of any possible danger to herself.

When she had gone a considerable distance she suddenly beheld her lover pause, evidently waiting for her approach, and with inexpressible delight she ran forward and cast herself into his arms.

In an instant, the man whom she supposed to be her lover clapped a handkerchief saturated with some pungent drug to her face, and after a brief struggle she lost consciousness and fainted.

Then the person who had lured her on smiled triumphantly, and giving a low whistle, was joined by another individual, who was dragging behind him an Indian toboggan or sled.

Bearing his unconscious burden upon the sled, the mysterious individual gave some whispered directions to his accomplice, who instantly started off at a brisk pace through the forest, dragging the sled behind him.

The principal plotter then cast his red cloak aside and disclosed the handsome though sinister features of Noll Edwards, who was thus carrying out the plan proposed to Schneider.

"Now to carry out the rest of my scheme," he muttered. "I must return to the pond at once. What joy I shall experience to see his agony when he hears that she is missing."

The rest of the man's movements the reader knows, with the exception of the fact that at the dam he contrived to drop the piece of wool already torn from May's dress and then picked it up again as though he had just discovered it.

When May recovered from the effects of the drug, which was not for several hours, she found herself lying upon a rough bed in a rude hut, but where it was she could not imagine.

There was but one room in the house, and this contained but little furniture, there being a large fireplace at one end where a genial fire of logs was blazing.

In one corner of the apartment, at a height of about ten feet from the ground, was a small platform or loft for storing provisions, which was approached by a ladder, and this with a couple of chairs and a dilapidated table was all that the room contained.

May could not imagine the motive that could have induced Frank to abduct her, for she had no suspicion of the truth, and after observing the place earnestly for awhile, the drug reasserted its sway, and she sank again into a deep slumber, from which she did not awake until the beams of the morning sun were shining in at the window.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CANNIBAL AGAIN—A BALKED VILLAIN.

WHEN May again awoke she arose and began a careful inspection of her prison, her coolness and self-possession having returned with the coming of the day.

The door was tightly closed, and resisted her every effort to force it, but the window was less impregnable, and with one blow from a dilapidated chair standing in a corner she utterly demolished it.

Then standing upon the chair she attempted to make her way through the hole which the absent sash furnished, when she was suddenly startled by seeing a rough hand appear close to her head.

She drew back instinctively, and in an instant the heavy outside shutter was slammed to and fastened with a loud bang, leaving her in total darkness, relieved only by the flickering firelight.

"Who is it that dares to keep me here a prisoner?" exclaimed May, indignantly, getting down from the chair.

"Keep yer mouth shut and you'll find out," said a mysterious voice.

"Who speaks?" said May.

There was no answer, and then the young girl, by listening attentively, discovered that there were two men outside, carrying on a conversation in a low tone.

In a few moments she heard a key turning in the lock, and then the door opened and a figure in a long scarlet cloak entered.

"What does this mean?" she demanded, retreating to the further side of the room. "To what am I to attribute this insult."

"To my deep love," said a harsh voice. "I love you ardently, and could not bear to see the prize carried away by another. Pardon my conduct, but it was only love which prompted it."

"Further disguise is unnecessary," said the brave girl. "I know you and have hitherto respected you. Spare me

the unwelcome task, therefore, of telling you what I think of you now."

"No, no; you shall not treat me thus coldly," said the man, advancing. "I ask your forgiveness for my rudeness, but I must have your love. I cannot live without it; cannot endure the thought of my rival's happiness. I can restore you to your father and no one be the wiser for what has happened, but only say that you love me. I will take you home at once, if you wish it."

"If you do that, I will say nothing concerning the incidents of the past night."

"But you must promise to be mine, adorable May," said Edwards, throwing aside his disguise. "Remember how long I have been attracted to you. I am wealthy and can give you every comfort, every luxury that heart can wish. My love is better than this stranger's, I loved you long before you ever saw him, I can exalt you to a high station, but this boor——"

"Silence, Mr. Edwards," said May. "Hitherto I have respected and had a certain liking for you. Do not forfeit all claims to my esteem. I know not how you became acquainted with the knowledge of my love for another, but since you know it, there is no need to repeat that I do not and cannot love you. Restore me to my friends, and I will treat you as I always have, but say nothing to me of love."

"Edwards remained in moody silence for some minutes, and then said:

Is this your final answer?"

"Yes."

"Then by Heaven, I do not regard it so. I will hear no more entreaties. You *shall* be mine, whether you will or not. If fair means will not suffice, then I will try foul! You shall not leave this place until you are mine. What do you say to that?"

"That I scorn and defy you! That I would sooner die than be your wife. Frank Standish loves me, and I him, and you will rue the day when he hears of this. Tremble, villain, for as I live you shall be punished for this!"

Edwards strode forward, and grasping the young girl by the wrist, hissed:

"He is powerless to aid you, and by the time he comes you will be glad to be my wife, nay, pray for such a boon."

"My God, what dreadful threat is this? You would not dare——"

"I dare do anything," hissed the scoundrel, and then he drew a handkerchief from his breast, the odor of some strong drug being at once perceptible.

May divined his intention, and breaking from his grasp called loudly for help.

"Spare your lungs," sneered Edwards. "There is no help at hand, and you will have to submit."

"Never! Sooner would I meet death. Help! help! Save me, Frank, save me!"

With an oath Edwards sprang toward the poor girl and attempted to seize her, but at the same time he felt himself grasped by a powerful hand, and then received a blow which sent him reeling to the floor.

Glancing up, when he recovered his senses, which was not for some moments, he beheld the giant form of the dreaded cannibal just disappearing through the door, bearing the unconscious May in his arms.

He sprang to his feet and ran out, but by that time the cannibal had plunged into the woods and was lost to view.

He had hardly recovered yet from the force of the blow given him by Cannibal Matt, and would have fallen again had not Jim Schneider, who had temporarily fled upon the approach of the mysterious being, now ran up and supported him.

"Py shiminies, Mishter Edwards, I vas hear somepody in dem voods!" said Jim, and in a moment Frank Standish and Jack Manly appeared in the direction opposite that taken by the cannibal.

"Is that you, Edwards?" asked Jack, approaching. "We just now got upon the track of the cannibal, after watching for him all night. We lost him again, and just now we heard a scream and rushed up. Have you seen him?"

Noll perceived his cue at once, and giving Schneider a warning look, he replied:

"Yes, I have seen the monster and the screams you heard were uttered by May Prendergast herself. I found her imprisoned in this cabin, and was upon the very point of rescuing her when this devil arrived, and with a blow from his gun knocked me senseless, and carried the poor girl off once more."

"Then let us follow him," exclaimed Frank, who had no reason to doubt the truth of this plausible story. "Are you sufficiently recovered to accompany us?"

"Yes, I will go, for I must avenge myself upon this fellow for his ill-treatment of me, to say nothing of the common cause which unites us all."

"Then let us return to the dam," said Jack, "for that seems to be his headquarters, and he will undoubtedly turn up there in the end."

"On the whole, I think you had better return to the village," said Frank, after a pause. "Your head is badly cut and ought to be attended to."

"I do not mind it, and had rather go with you."

"No, no, I cannot permit it. You are really badly hurt, and need medical assistance. You shall hear of anything which may happen."

Edwards appeared to consent reluctantly to this plan, and in a few moments Frank and Jack were out of sight.

"Vat vas to be done now, py dunder?" asked Jim. "Py hookies, you vas fool dem vellus foost glass."

"We must get rid of this meddlesome lover of the girl's, for if he rescues her he will learn all. I would like to put a bullet through him. Hist! who is this?"

"Mine gracious, it was dot Johnny Bat," said Jim, as the man appeared in sight. "Hello, Johnny, vere vos you going so quick?"

"*Mon Dieu!* I am on ze war trail. I make ze swift pursuit after ze cannibal! *Sacre bleu!* I sall kill him venev-
aire I shall see him."

"Vas you meant to catch him alive, Johnny," asked Jim.

"*Parbleu! oui,* I catch him alive and skin him. Wild Moose, ze sauvage chief and myself are in league togezzer, and we get up what you call an expediton against zis monstaire."

"Good enough," said Edwards.

"Ze Moose has ze idea vere zis man hide himself, and so we go to hunt him out. He is no skeletong, as you

would say, but a man like myself. Ze dam is ze place to find him, and I walk myself zere quicklee."

"You're right," said Edwards, a sudden thought striking him; "the dam is the place, and even at this moment he is resting himself on the cliff, at the right bank of the river. Tell the Moose to take his men and surprise the wretch; shoot him down at once."

"Is zat so?"

"Yes, I know he's there. Tell the chief to shoot down any white man he sees on the cliff, and he will rid his tribe of the man who has pestered him so long."

"*Sapristi!* I will tell him, and he will be so glad to put zis villain out of ze way. Ah, oui, I will tell him, and now, goot morring, *mes comarades.*"

"Now," said Edwards, as the Canadian disappeared, "let master Frank chuckle at his success in winning May from me, for he has not long to live. When the Indian finds out his mistake, he will have no one to blame but himself, and then I shall have the lovely May in spite of this young upstart."

"So help me Shiminies, dot vas a pully blan," said Jim.

"Only I tole you how to make sure off dot."

"How!"

"Shust go to dot village, und tole der beebles dot dem Ingines vas attacked Frank py dot dam. You vas got a pig barty already, to go mit his assistance."

"Yes."

"You goes mit dem, und in dot gonfusion, you drives a pullet mit Mister Frank's eye out. You undershtand me?"

"I do, Jim, and by Jove, you are a trump."

"Yaw, I vas de shoker, der besht drump in der pack. So hellup me, I vas earn me dot hoonded tollar vat you bromise me."

"You will more than earn it, Jim. Aha! this boor will rue the day that he ever crossed me, or tried to snatch the prize from my grasp. Come, let us return to the village."

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE HOUSE OF THE CANNIBAL.

WE now introduce the reader to one of the secret lairs of Cannibal Matt, consisting of a hollow in the side of a bluff, covered over by an immense snow drift, which the man has dug into with great labor, and considerably enlarged his apartment.

By beating down the snow as he had dug it away, he had made the walls of his house into solid ice, through which the light penetrated in certain spots as through a window.

Back in the cave proper was a small fire, the smoke from which made a thick festooned deposit upon the rocky walls all round.

The fire was not of wood, but of animal fat, in the midst of which a huge wick was inserted, and burned steadily like a lamp, affording both light and heat, the place being stifling hot, owing to the lack of ventilation.

The floor was carpeted with the skins of animals, the smooth fur making a delightfully soft and warm surface to walk upon, and in one corner was a long box filled with pine branches and covered over with moss and fur that answered capitally the purpose of a bed.

Upon this couch lay the inanimate form of May Prendergast, and crouching before the fire was the cannibal himself.

He had divested himself of his hideous head-piece, and appeared to be a man in the middle age of life, with regular and even handsome features, though there was a strange look about his eyes which is not usually seen in persons who are in the full possession of their intellects.

The strange creature gazed at the girl in silence for some moments, and occasionally covered his face with his hands as if to conceal the rising tears, though he made no sign.

Presently he produced some drug from a little cupboard containing all sorts of odds and ends, and held the vial to May's nostrils, causing her to start suddenly and open her eyes.

For a moment the girl was about to call for help, but seeing something in the man's face which reassured her, she asked:

"How did I come here?"

"Be not alarmed," answered Matt. "You are safer than where I found you."

"You are very kind, and now if you will take me to my father you will earn my eternal gratitude."

"I dare not go near the dwellings of men. I cannot until my horrible task is done."

He arose suddenly and strode fiercely up and down the confined space, muttering to himself and looking like a wild animal chaffing at his confinement.

After awhile he grew calmer, and at length paused in front of May and asked:

"Who are you, girl? Your face is really something which I thought I had forgotten. The sight of you makes me feel human again. Tears arise to my eyes, and I thought their source forever burned and scorched away."

"I am May Prendergast, the daughter of the tavern-keeper at Crookston. Pray take me within sight of the village, and I can go the rest of the way alone."

"Is your father alive, then?"

This simple question was asked in such a tone that May started and answered, excitedly:

"For Heaven's sake, what do you know of him? Do you know aught concerning my early history?"

The man was buried in thought for a few minutes, and then he said:

"Such a lily could never spring from such a gnarled and rugged trunk. You are surely not his child?"

"I am not, although no one but my father and myself are aware of this fact. One day, some years ago, while in the woods, he found me lying wounded and half-dead upon a mossy bank, and taking me home, brought me up as his own child. You seem agitated. Do you know my real parents?"

"Have you any relic of your childhood days—any article that you had when found?"

"Yes, there is this locket which I have always worn. It contains the portrait of a lovely lady whom I have always thought to be my mother. Her eyes have such a tender look that I know I could love her."

She took the locket, which hung around her neck upon a gold chain, and handed it to her strange preserver, who regarded it for some moments with her greatest attention,

and considerable emotion, which he did not attempt to conceal.

May became very much agitated, and cried passionately:

"Who are you, that you feel for me so? I see that you are touched. Tell me, in mercy's name, what you know of my parents."

"Have you no recollections yourself?"

"None. My exposure brought on an acute attack of brain fever, and when I recovered I could remember nothing but my first name."

"And that was——"

"May."

"Heaven preserve us!" ejaculated the man. "I fear, my child," he continued, slowly and solemnly, "that in me you have found your unhappy father. Had I known that you had not perished, my life might have been different. Now I am not fit to be acknowledged as your parent. No, no, do not approach me," for May had risen and started towards him; "did you know me better, you would recoil in horror."

"Oh, no, I could not; I would love you, I know."

"You shall be restored to your despairing friends this very night, and then I ask you to forget forever what I have said, and blot me from your memory. For myself, I shall abandon my unhallowed revenge, and you shall never see me more."

"But you would never abandon your child?" cried May. "If you are my father, I shall love and respect you. Return with me to the village; my adopted father will tell you all you wish to know of me."

"No, no, I cannot. Do you not know me? I am called Cannibal Matt."

May turned as pale as death and shuddered, for she had indeed heard the terrible stories that were told concerning this man, and she shrank back in horror.

The man laughed bitterly, and then said in grave tones:

"You see. Even your filial regard cannot endure the mention of my name. You could not love a man like me."

"No, no, those dreadful stories cannot be true," replied May. "I never believed them, and now that I have seen you, I will not believe you guilty of such dreadful practices as you are charged with."

"What do they say of me?" he asked, and May told him the story as heard from the lips of Frank Standish.

"This is not all," he said. "They say also that I devour the flesh of my enemies."

"But I will not believe that."

"Listen, and you shall hear my story and judge for yourself. Hist! What is that noise? Some one is coming. I must go and see who it is."

Matt withdrew to the cave, and climbed a short ladder, passing through a circular opening through which he usually descended to his subterranean retreat.

He returned after a short absence, and reported that a party of Chippewas was outside, and that it might be necessary for him to fight his way out, and that he feared also that her presence there would be fraught with peril, as the Indians were evidently incensed against the whites on his account, and might make her an innocent victim should they find her.

"We must remain here until night, at any event," he said, "but I think I shall baffle them yet."

They waited several hours, and then, when it had grown quite dark outside, Matt pulled away the bench at one side of the cave, and disclosed a circular opening leading to a passage which he said led along through the snow close to the side of the bluff, and had its exit in the root of a hollow tree at some little distance.

Bidding her follow him, he entered the passage and made his way for about a hundred feet, when he came to a sharp turn where there was room enough for two or three persons to sit down.

Bidding May await his return, he continued his course, returning after a few minutes absence with the report that their retreat was cut off in that direction, a savage being posted at the foot of the tree to prevent anyone from coming out.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAVE BESIEGED—A CLEVER ESCAPE.

"We must return to the cave," said Matt, "I will go first."

They began to return therefore, but when they nearly reached the cave, were surprised to hear voices inside.

The bench which closed the opening had been replaced, and therefore its existence was not discovered by the intruders, though there was no knowing when it might be.

The position of the man was a bad one, for he was unable to protect himself, and was liable to be knocked on the head like a rabbit in a hole at any moment.

He suddenly saw a ray of light enter the passage, and he concluded that the entrance had been discovered, and that some one was coming to look for him.

He bade May retreat to the bend in the path, while he himself, advanced to reconnoiter.

The light was presently cut off, and suspecting that somebody had entered the hole from the cave, Matt flattened himself against the bottom of the passage and held his breath, awaiting developments.

There was a loud report, and a bullet passed just over his head, the wind it made being plainly perceptible as it sped by.

Here was danger, indeed, for a man might easily hit him without taking any aim whatever, his own cramped position not permitting any freedom of movement, either in attack or defense.

To render his situation more perilous, he now heard a scream from May, which told him that the enemy had forced an entrance in the rear, and that he was literally between two fires.

Something must be done at once, and, with a spring, the man made his way so quickly towards the cave that he ran his head solidly against that of the Chippewa in the passage, who was just preparing for a second shot.

Matt seized the Indian by the throat with his long, bony fingers, and closed his iron grasp upon the savage's windpipe so fiercely that the poor fellow was unable to utter a sound.

Then the cannibal dragged him into the passage, vainly struggling to release himself, and after awhile his muscles

relaxed and he died without a spasm, having been choked to death.

The cannibal then doubled up the body of the Indian, and stopped up the passage so completely with it that no bullets could pass, and considerable work would be required to remove it.

When this had been done, Matt started to return to May, whom he found in the turn of the path, pale and excited, holding a blood-stained knife in her hand.

The knife was a small affair, such as is carried in the pocket, and May explained the blood upon it by saying that a Chippewa had endeavored to enter the passage by the hollow tree, and that she had stuck the weapon into the calves of his legs, and caused him to beat a hasty retreat.

The light and narrowness of the passages through the tree rendered it impossible for any one to enter except feet first, and this part was of considerable advantage to May, as she could see the enemy and be invisible to him.

No further demonstration was made at the moment, the savages being evidently nonplused at the determined resistance made by the man whom they had supposed to be cornered.

Matt set his wits to work and he determined to dig his way out, the snow shovel with which he had made the former excavations being stuck in the wall near by.

This implement had a sharp wide blade and a very short handle, so that in a contracted space it could be used to the best advantage.

He began digging in the side of the bank at once, throwing the snow behind him, and treading it down smooth and hard, working so rapidly that before long he had dug completely through the drift.

Cautiously putting his head out, North looked around him, and seeing no one in sight, the night being intensely dark, he called to May to follow.

The opening in the drift was in the middle of a clump of pines, where they could conceal themselves with no difficulty.

Slinging his rifle over his shoulder, the man led the way over the hardened snow, cautioning May against making any unnecessary noise, and in this way quite a distance was traveled without interruption.

The man was beginning to congratulate himself upon his success in evading the savages, when a perfect storm of yells broke upon their ears, indicating that the savages had discovered their escape.

Terrified beyond measure, May sank upon the snow, her strength completely gone, and her soul filled with despair.

"Leave me, my father!" she cried; "save yourself, at all events. The savages will not hurt me, for I have never injured them."

"Leave you, child?" said North. "No indeed; I will never leave you. I will not trust you to the mercy of these wretches."

"But you will be captured."

"Not so. I shall baffle them yet. I have another safe retreat from which they cannot drive me, and once there, I can defy them!"

Then he caught May up in his strong arms, and strode away rapidly, muttering to himself:

"Once let me reach the dam, and I can laugh at these

yelling fiends. Aha, they are coming—they have discovered my tracks. Then I must hasten."

Grasping May tenderly in his arms, North then started off at a rapid pace, followed by the Indians, who were close behind, and yelling like so many demons.

CHAPTER IX.

ATTACKED BY INDIANS—CAPTURE OF THE CANNIBAL.

FRANK and Jack remained upon the cliff watching for Matt, keeping the beaver dam in sight, and never once tiring in their vigil through the whole day.

Frank was moody and despairing, for he dreaded to think of May in the power of the cannibal, and even envied Noll Edwards for having done something towards her rescue, even though it had not been successful.

Jack tried to cheer his comrade up, though it was a hard job, and one which he would have shrunk from had he not been so fond of his friend.

Night came on at last, and there was no moon, although the whiteness of the landscape all around enabled the watchers to see more clearly than they could have otherwise done.

While one kept watch the other dozed, and this was done alternately until a late hour, when Jack, who was on guard, suddenly awoke Frank, saying:

"I see something down there, crossing the glade, which looks like a man."

Frank was broad awake in a moment, and gazing intently at the spot indicated by Jack, saw a huge figure crossing the open space from the edge of the forest.

The giant walked slowly as if from fatigue or wounded, and finally disappeared behind a clump of bushes that stood solitary and alone in the middle of the opening.

"Now we have him," said Frank, and then the two began hastily lowering themselves down the cliff, never once taking their eyes from the spot where the dread cannibal had disappeared.

Swiftly they reached the edge of the glade, and advanced rapidly to the bushes where the man must still be in hiding, as they had not seen him leave.

They held their rifles in readiness, expecting a shot at any instant, and when within a dozen feet of the bushes, fired simultaneously, and rushed forward.

They sprang into the bushes, but to their intense surprise there was nothing there.

It was perfectly incredulous that the man could have left without their seeing him, and yet their search was utterly fruitless.

The space within the bushes was so small that a thorough search could be made in a few minutes, and to their chagrin, the young men did not find the cannibal, dead or alive, or see any traces of him.

This startling fact served greatly to increase the depression of spirits under which Frank was laboring, and nothing could change it.

He was beginning to wonder if the cannibal did not indeed possess supernatural powers, when Jack dispelled the thought by saying:

"The man has a secret lair in this very place, I do believe. Depend upon it, we have the key in our hands, and

it will take but little time to unlock this mystery. Let us carefully examine the ground all about."

They were about to do this when they were suddenly startled by a bullet whizzing past their heads.

Instantly a chorus of yells from a party of Chippewas was heard, nearly deafening them.

"Good Heavens Jack!" gasped Frank. "The Chippewas take us for that mortal enemy of theirs—Cannibal Matt. They would not fire upon us otherwise."

Neither of the young men suspected the treachery of Edwards, but attributed the attack solely to the supposition upon the part of the Indians that their natural enemy was concealed in the bushes.

In an instant a shower of bullets rattled around them, and that they escaped being hit was indeed a miracle.

"We're in for it now," muttered Jack, "for although a word from us would show these fellows their mistake, there is no time to say it. We should be riddled with bullets the moment we showed ourselves."

"Down, Jack," cried Frank, pulling his companion to the ground as another bullet whistled by. "We can't stand this; we must return the fire."

He did so, and with fatal success, as the shriek of agony from the dusky besiegers testified.

The savages silently surrounded the retreat of the two friends, being convinced that they had brought their prey to bay, and for a while the firing ceased.

The savages were active, however, and soon gave a display of their ingenuity, which was nothing less than the placing of a series of masked batteries, as they might be, made of pine branches, upon their toboggans, and pushing the same forward while they remained concealed behind.

These clumsy contrivances advanced slowly but surely towards them, and though they fired once or twice, they could not hit the savages, who were too carefully screened.

The crisis would soon be reached, for they could not hope to be victorious in the hand-to-hand conflict which would surely take place when the Chippewas got a little nearer, so that they could make a sudden rush.

As if by a mutual understanding, the friends arose and stood ready to meet the onset, rifles in hand, and every nerve strained to the utmost.

When within only a few yards of the bushes one of the sleds stuck fast, and would not budge, and the Indian behind it incautiously stepped out and tried to move it.

In an instant he was sprawling out upon the snow, his hands clutching convulsively, and the death-rattle sounding in his throat.

Both Frank and Jack were surprised, for they had not fired a shot, nor had they heard one, and yet this savage had been shot down before their very eyes.

Another Chippewa rushed out to drag in his comrade, when the barrel of a rifle was suddenly thrust out between Frank and Jack, and the savage bit the dust.

Frank turned quickly and saw the figure of Cannibal Matt standing close beside him, in all his horrible regalia, but where he came from the young man had no idea.

At the same moment the Indians left the cover of their batteries and dashed pell mell towards the bushes; uttering the most hideous yells.

In an instant Matt North's calm bearing changed, and clubbing his rifle he rushed into the midst of the Chippewas,

scattering them right and left and clearing a space around him as fast as it was filled up.

The Indians fought with the utmost bravery, closing in upon the frenzied giant like a pack of wolves on the flank of a deer.

Frank and Jack had not left the shelter of the thicket, and the Indians, fancying that the cannibal had been its only occupant, directed all their energies against him.

At last even his enormous strength began to give out, and his struggles against such fearful odds more and more futile, a chance blow upon the head from a clubbed musket causing him to stagger.

The howling mob rushed upon him as quick as lightning, and he was borne to the ground with a dozen yelling savages on top of him.

Frank's sympathies were awakened, for in his agony he feared that the death of the only person who knew of May's whereabouts before he had disclosed his secret would result in the girl's never being found.

Without thinking of the consequences, therefore, he broke from his cover and rushed upon the Indians, intending to ask them to spare the man's life until he could learn the important secret.

Instantly he was surrounded by the yelling demons, who took him for a friend of the cannibal's and attacked him most furiously, and though he defended himself valiantly he was quickly overpowered and fell badly wounded to the earth.

Jack rushed to his defense, and in a moment a shout announced that a party of whites was coming to the rescue of their friends.

Noll Edwards headed this party which burst through the trees, fired a volley upon the astonished redskins, and routed them.

The victors then began to look into the condition of those they had rescued, finding Frank upon the ground, insensible from a bad cut in the head, Jack Manly not badly hurt, and North nearly covered with the dead bodies of his foes.

The cannibal was released and then securely bound, although nearly insensible, the men intending to make an example of him on account of the abduction of May Prendergast, which by the evidence of Noll Edwards was charged to him.

"When he arrived he refused to say a word in his defense, nor did he appear to comprehend his situation, his eyes having a vacant look, and his lips moving as if he were saying something, but what it was no one could tell.

"Lynch him!" cried one or two of the most hot-headed in the party.

"Aye, to Judge Lynch with him," cried Edwards. "String him up to the nearest tree."

"No, no," cried Jack Manly, interposing himself between the supposed cannibal and his would-be executioners. "If you kill him, how are you going to know what has become of May. He alone knows the secret, and we must wait until he is in a condition to tell it. Just now his mind seems wandering, but he will recover beyond a doubt."

"He is shamming," cried Noll Edwards, in a rage, "for he had his particular reasons for getting rid of the man before he should make some allusions which might be very damaging to his, Edwards', safety.

Old Prendergast addressed a few earnest words to North, and asked him to tell him where May was, but the man only stared vacantly at him and uttered never a word.

Finally, at the instance of Jack, it was decided to take the man to Crookston, and hold him a prisoner for two or three days in the hopes that he would then say something, and the whole party set out, North being evidently oblivious to all that was going on around him.

CHAPTER X.

VILLAINY AGAIN TRIUMPHANT.

THE open glade which had so lately been the scene of a terrible conflict, was now utterly deserted, the only semblance of human life being the stark and cold bodies of the Indians who had been slain.

This state of things did not last long, however, for two men presently parted the bushes and came into the open space.

These men were Noll Edwards and Jim Schneider, who had quietly left the party, bearing the unconscious Frank and the taciturn Matt.

"Did you vas dink dot you could cotch der gal again, boss?" asked Jim.

"I must do so. She cannot be far away, and we must search everywhere for her hiding place."

The two searched everywhere without success, and at last entered the little clump of bushes which has already played so important a part in this story.

Here they found nothing, until Schneider, having quite by accident trod upon a pine sapling, was precipitated to the snow where he lay sprawling upon his back.

"Mein gracious, dot dree vas let me down," he cried. "So hellup me, I pelieves dot vas a hole und der dree vas der key to him."

The two men laid hold of the tree, and pulled it completely from the ground, a mass of frozen snow clinging to it, and thereby disclosed a hole four or five feet deep, and large enough to admit a man.

Schneider at once jumped into it, but quickly sprang out, exclaiming:

"So hellup mein goodness! dere vas vater in dot hole. Shust look auf mein boots!"

The lower parts of his legs were dripping wet, and Edwards looking in saw that the bottom of the hole was filled with water.

"He must have his secret lair here, for this is where he has always disappeared, in the neighborhood of the beaver dam," said Edwards. "Give me a pole, and I will sound this place."

A long stick was soon found, and Edwards groped around with it, pushing it from side to side to see whether the hole extended any further than he could see or not.

Suddenly the water disappeared and a hard, smooth floor was disclosed.

Jumping into the hole, Edwards discovered the secret of the water's disappearance.

A shallow tank, made of rough boards and bark, and capable of being shoved back like a draw in a table or cabinet, had been placed at the bottom, so that if by chance the hole should be discovered, no one would suppose that it was inhabited by a human being.

Grouping about with his hands, the explorer discovered that there was a low vaulted passage leading towards the river, and along this he advanced for quite a distance, in pitch darkness.

Then the passage seemed to widen and grow higher, for he could touch neither the top or sides, as before.

Drawing a match from his pocket he lit it, and by the blaze saw that he was in a chamber with a round dome, about six feet high and the same in diameter, built of clay and having ledges around the sides.

He saw at once that he was in one of the winter residence of the beaver, and that the place had been utilized by the ingenious cannibal for a retreat, no one ever being likely to suspect his presence in such a place.

Just as the match went out, Edwards saw that there was another passage farther on and towards that he advanced, being suddenly conscious of the presence of some living creature in the place, but whether human or animal he could not tell.

Suddenly he heard a voice which thrilled every fibre of his being, exclaim:

"Is that you, father?"

He recognized the voice of May Prendergast, and though puzzled to know why she should call upon her father, he determined to resort to stratagem to get her outside, and into his power once more.

Disguising his voice as much as possible, he said in a whisper:

"Yes, it is I. We must leave this place at once. Come, I will wait for you outside."

Then he retreated to the opening, where he found Jim Schneider awaiting him with considerable anxiety.

Poor May had been unconscious when her newly-found parent had brought her to this strange place, and when she recovered she did not know where she was, North telling her that they would be obliged to remain hidden until his enemies had withdrawn.

They had then held a long conversation, in which he had explained much that was mysterious in his conduct, and had also told her many incidents of her childhood.

She began to feel the most tender love for the man who had been so terribly misrepresented, the man himself being perfectly calm and gentle once more.

Suddenly, however, the dull reports of fire-arms were heard, and then he became terribly excited, and seizing his rifle he left the underground retreat.

After awhile the silence became dreadful, the firing having suddenly ceased, and May waited anxiously for his return.

When he did not come, she feared that he had been killed, and she was about to undertake the exploration of the singular retreat when she heard some one moving in the outer chamber.

Following the voice, she crept rapidly along until a burst of light nearly blinded her, when she felt herself lifted out by a pair of strong arms, and in a moment recovered her sight only to find herself in the presence of her original abductor and the cause of all her troubles.

She recoiled, and would have fled, but Edwards, detaining her gently, said:

"You have to thank me that you have been delivered from what might have been your living tomb, for the can-

nibal is insane, and will say nothing, and Frank Standish is dying. Should he be taken away I trust you will listen to my suit, and in time become my wife."

"Frank dying!" exclaimed the poor girl. "Oh, take me to him, that I may comfort his last moments. You would not be so cruel as to take me from his side at such a moment."

Edwards was enraged that his appeal should be so ignored, and he would have broken out into a torrent of abuse, which would have revealed his base intentions, had not Jim Schneider suddenly interrupted him, saying:

"Ve might as vell dake der young leddy to dot lone hut, vere dey have tooken der young veller. Dot vasn't far, und ve won't be doo late, I guess not."

Edwards saw his follower's ruse at once, but fearful that a too ready acquiescence would alarm May's suspicions, advanced upon Schneider, and giving him a peculiar wink, said:

"What, rascal, do you mean to thwart me at last?"

"Vell, it don't vas do no harm to let the young leddy seen him shust a little minute before he vas kick der bucket, ain't it?"

May, completely deceived, now implored Edwards to take her to the hut, and the villain, after appearing to reflect, finally consented, and ordered Jim to lead the way.

The party traveled quickly over the snow, the day being now well advanced, and before long the hut appeared in sight.

It seemed utterly deserted, however, and May, with a strange fear at her heart, ran forward, and throwing the door open rushed in.

There was nothing to be seen, and the girl turned to retreat when the door closed, and she found herself face to face with Noll Edwards, the expression upon whose face made him seem a veritable demon.

"What means this new deception?" cried May.

"That you are in my power, and shall never leave this place until you are my wife."

CHAPTER XI.

RESCUED AT LAST—CONCLUSION.

WHEN the whites started to return to the village they placed the unconscious Frank upon a toboggan, the jolting of which presently restored him to his senses, and he arose to his feet and walked along with his friends, feeling somewhat sore though not seriously injured.

The wound in his head had stopped bleeding, and though he felt dazed for a few moments, this feeling soon wore off and he was himself again.

He sought the prisoner, determined to see whether he could not learn the fate of May, and making a sign to the man who led the cannibal, intimated to him to leave them alone for awhile.

The giant's arms were pinioned, and Frank seeing that his lips seemed dry and parched, gave him a drink from a spirit flask which he carried.

The man seemed grateful, and after walking along by his side a few moments, Frank said, quietly:

"Matt North, you are a man that has suffered much, who has seen the destruction of all that makes life dear, and who has been driven by the cruelty of savages to take a direful revenge, but the whites have not injured you and

why should you plunge us in sorrow? Where is this young girl? Her father is near you and I myself am her affianced husband. Think of this and have pity upon the sorrowing friends. Tell us where she is."

"I have nothing against the whites," murmured the man, evidently moved by this appeal.

"Then why have you taken away the poor girl?"

"If you saw a lamb in the power of a wolf what would you do? Attempt to save it? Yes, indeed. That is what I have done. A human wolf was carrying away this girl, and I stepped in between him and his prey."

"What do you mean? Do you know where she is?"

"I do, but you cannot find her. I would not have said this much to any one else, but your sorrow has touched me. Cut my bonds, and I will show you where she is."

They were now somewhat in advance of the others, and it would have been an easy matter for Frank to have released the man, though he recoiled from the action.

"Release me, and meet me at the beaver dam in half an hour and I will deliver the child to you," repeated the man, and at last Frank consented for May's sake, as he believed this strange creature would do as he had promised.

He accordingly drew his knife across the man's bonds and the latter immediately bounded away, while Frank fell down to make it appear as though Matt had struck him.

The man disappeared so quickly that but a faint attempt was made to recapture him, and then the party continued on their way to the village, Frank soon slipping away unobserved.

When he reached the dam he found Matt standing near a clump of bushes, leaning on his rifle which he had pulled out from under the pile of dead Indians.

May was not in sight, and Frank suspected that the man had practiced deception upon him in order to make a victim of him.

Throwing his rifle to his shoulder, he called out to North to defend himself, and then the latter first seemed to be aware of the other's presence, and, casting his rifle to the ground, said, gravely:

"Reflect, sir, before you take my life. You may live to regret the deed."

"Where is May? You promised to give her to me. You have lied so as to bring me here and take my life."

"No; no, it is not so! I left the girl here, and some one has discovered her retreat and carried her off."

"The Chippewas."

"No. You have a worse enemy than the Chippewas. It is a white man who has carried her away, and doubtless the same from whom I rescued her in the lone hut in the forest. Your enemy is Noll Edwards."

"The villain! I noticed that he was not in the party when I recovered. He must have returned to this spot and discovered this hiding place. Where shall we find him now?"

"At the hut, without a doubt."

"Then let us go there at once. The villain shall pay dearly for this."

The wicked career of Noll Edwards was drawing to a close, and a crisis was now approaching—two determined men being already upon his path who were resolved to bring him to a speedy reckoning.

Meanwhile, what has occurred in the lone hut, where the two villains had enticed the innocent girl.

Edwards advanced, after declaring to May that she must be his wife, and producing a document, said:

"Sign this contract and the deed is done, as that is sufficient by the laws of Minnesota. Your lover is dead by this time, and I surely deserve some reward for having saved you."

"Never! I would rather die than be linked to such a villain."

"Then die you shall!" hissed Edwards, making a spring at the girl, his features distorted with rage.

He did not expect her next movement, however, for, running to the further end of the room, she hastily ascended to

the little platform, and then sent the ladder clattering to the floor.

After a moment's deliberation, the villain replaced the ladder and attempted to get up, but May had drawn the knife which she had already used with such good effect upon the Indians, and when Noll's face appeared, she gave him a bad cut upon the forehead which caused him to fall to the floor, cursing like a fiend.

Schneider then endeavored to get at the brave girl, but the sight of the knife deterred him, and he quickly retreated.

He suggested, however, that the ladder be put up to one of the other cross-beams of the cabin, and that they should spring from that to the platform, the distance being not very great.

Both men sprang at once upon the platform, and a fierce struggle began, the result being that the frail structure fell to the floor, bearing its occupants with it.

May was uppermost and received no hurt, but Noll had struck his head against the stone hearth with sufficient force to dislocate his neck.

Schneider was thrown into a corner, where he lay doubled up, groaning and grunting, while May, extricating herself from the debris, rushed from the hut and ran directly into Frank Standish's arms.

When she had related her story all three went into the hut, where they found Edwards cold and dead, the vengeance of Heaven having fallen upon him when least expected.

Schneider had fled, the open window telling the story of how he had escaped, but he was of no account, and no one cared to pursue him.

The party returned to Crookston where they were received with great joy, Matt North being quickly acquitted of any designs against the whites upon May's story being told.

It was readily proved that he was May's father, and then the dreaded cannibal, which he was in name only, gave a long account of his proceedings, and the manner of carrying out his vengeance against the Indians, whose presence always made him temporarily insane and caused him to do things which he had no recollection of afterwards.

He had lived in the woods to be near them, and had pretended to eat the bodies of the Indians in order to terrify them all the more, his silent weapon being nothing more than an air gun.

When he had discarded his hideous disguise and appeared clothed like other men, he was quite a different being, and was a kindly-looking, gentle, really handsome and noble old gentleman, the change being so great that no one would have known him.

Now that he had discovered his long lost daughter whom he had supposed dead, he abandoned his rough life and gave up his revenge, living with the whites as one of them, and never being suspected by the Indians as having been the terrible Cannibal Matt.

Jim Schneider reappeared in Crookston after a short absence, but being the same shiftless, drunken fellow as of old, and having evidently repented of his share in the abduction of May, he was not proceeded against, but permitted to drink himself to death in a few years, and was then buried in the Potter's Field, where the body of Noll Edwards had been put, nobody having claimed his remains, though his relatives had been duly notified of his death.

Frank and May were married that next spring, and great was the rejoicing thereat, all the beauty and aristocracy of Crookston being present.

The happy pair have long ago removed to a large city in the East, where they live with May's father, whose strange story has now become a legend among the Indians, and probably no one is still living in Crookston who could tell you the exact story, or who had ever seen that strange character CANNIBAL MATT.

[THE END.]

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